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EMERSON,  
HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS.

BY JANUARY SEARLE. *pseudonym for*

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## EMERSON,

### HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS.



RALPH WALDO EMERSON is unquestionably an original thinker and writer; a man of deep insight and powerful utterance, in whose mind the dreamy spiritualism of Asia and the practical common sense of New England are strangely and yet harmoniously blended. He stands alone in his country, and like the old philosophers whom he describes as "Babe-like Jupiters sitting on their clouds, and prattling from age to age to each other," he has no contemporary. True it is, that America has produced many men of learning and talent, both as writers and speakers, —from Jonathan Edwards to Cooper, Daniel Webster, and Channing—but we find none amongst them who is made up of the fine materials which belong to the nature of Emerson, and none who has such bold and startling thoughts, or who has clothed them in such rich and varied garments. For the first time in American history, a man is born, in his person, who dares to think for himself; who puts under his foot all creeds and traditions, and seeks the spirit at first-hand. He abandons the old beaten tracks of theology, its incomprehensible dogmas and the absurd mysteries of its faith; he has tried them long and earnestly for food and life, and found them bones and death. They can yield him neither nourishment, support, nor consolation,—nor can they satisfy his intellect or the longings of his soul. These things, then, he has done

with for ever, nor shall they haunt him with their ghastly faces and hooded eyes any more. And this abandonment of the old ground of speculation and belief is one of the secrets whereby Emerson's writings are made so attractive and fascinating. There is, indeed, such freshness and charm about them, that they read like a new revelation. The truths he utters seem as if they had come directly from heaven; and they flash in his pages like those burning jewels which good St. John speaks of as illuminating the pavements of the celestial city. There is nothing hackneyed in his manner; but it is free, bold, and impulsive. He puts our language to new uses, and makes it speak with new eloquence. There is a strange music in his sentences, which allures and captivates the mind; and his words are often great and memorable. A true inspiration abides with him, and fills him with sacred fire. He wastes no breath, does not stoop to the tricks of speech, nor pander to the prejudices or convictions of men; but he goes direct to his mark, sometimes with an abruptness which is startling enough. And the reason is, that he has really much to communicate which concerns his fellows, which vitally concerns them; and he leaves, therefore, the ground of a low expediency, and speaks prophet-like from the high platform of the conscience and the intellect.

It is easy enough to see how much Emerson has struggled—how bravely he has fought—to gain the vantage ground which he occupies. He is no mere lip-man, who talks from reminiscences and recollections of other men's experience; but all he utters is unmistakeable conviction, and bears upon it the impress of the fiery ordeal through which he has passed. In some of his earlier writings he is as earnest as Paul, and his injunctions flame like swords, and pierce to the very heart. Rely upon yourself, and believe in God—rely upon no man or men, how holy soever they may be, or how venerable their memories may have become through the faith and reverence of the ages which have consecrated them. This is the base of his doctrine—the foundation upon which all his teachings rest. Like Maccall he teaches the “indi-

viduality of the individual," exhorts to purity, and commands all men to obey the spirit, and the moral law. And this obedience is to be implicit, without questioning or faltering; not rendered for "daily food," or any selfish consideration, but because it is right, and in accordance with that unchangeable integrity which upholds the universe. He says:—

Brother, sweeter is the law  
Than all the grace love ever saw.  
We are its suppliants; by it we  
Draw the breath of eternity.  
Serve thou it not for daily bread—  
Serve it for fear, and want, and need;  
Love it, though it hide its light;  
By love, behold the sun at night;  
Though the law should thee forget,  
More enamoured, serve it yet.  
Though it hate thee, suffer long,  
Put the spirit in the wrong;  
That were a deed to sing in Eden,  
By waters of life to spirits heeding.

During the early part of his life he officiated as pastor in one of the Unitarian chapels in Boston; but he was by no means popular, although some of the highest men of the city attended his ministrations. He had, indeed, none of the elements of popularity in him: his thoughts were too remote from the range of ordinary minds, to make him acceptable to them. But those who understood his doctrine loved the teacher. He had not warmth enough, however, for an orator, but was cool and statuesque. Channing, on the other hand, was full of enthusiasm—spoke to the popular heart and sympathies, and had a large congregation. The Unitarian faith, which to him was so vital and all-absorbing, was to Emerson not of so much moment; nor did he set it forth with any prominence in his discourses. He dealt more with morals than with doctrines; loved speculation, and brought down truths to earth from those rare regions which only the greatest spirits have traversed. Unitarianism could not confine a mind like his, he soon saw that, in spite of its professed liberality and rationalism, it was neither liberal nor rational; that it could tolerate no thinker who went beyond its orthodoxy; and, in short, that there

was no rest for him in its boundaries. He broke loose, therefore, from them, and became a priest of nature, instead of a ministering servant to a cold and lifeless creed.

The result was soon manifest in his writings. He was now untrammelled, and free to speak the thoughts which flooded his soul; and he was faithful to this freedom. Everywhere, in his books, he exults in it, and seems to swim in a divine atmosphere. And yet, he is not a complete man; nor do his writings possess any epical unity. It is true that certain ideas run like threads of fire through them all, and give to them a kind of consistence; but it is not *architectural* consistence: all is fragmentary and incomplete. He is the spokesman of many thoughts, not the organizer of a philosophy. And yet I think his essays are of more sterling worth than any system of philosophy which he could have devised. They contain certainly a strange mixture of thoughts and opinions, and he has gone to the remotest east, as well as to the schools of Greece, Rome, England, and Germany, to ask of them Goethe's great question—"What can you teach me?" In the character of his mind he is akin to the most opposite men: to Plato and Socrates; to Plotinus and Swedenborg; to Montaigne also and Franklin: and he is as thoroughly versed in the laws of prudence, and the economy of housekeeping, as in those subtle revelations which come from God to the soul, and constitute the spiritual wealth of the world. He is one of the giants who will *not* be "slaughtered with pins;" nor allow the concerns of the spirit to outweigh the responsibilities of practical life. He is a seer, who looks on all sides of Nature and of human life, and announces what he sees. He is not tied down to one idea, however magnificent or holy; nor does he seek to make converts, or stereotype men in creeds, or found an institution. He is too large for sectarianism, and lives in the wide latitudes of the intellect, under the starry heavens of faith. For although the intellect is ever uppermost in him, controlling his visions and imagination, and giving an icy tinge to his



warmest colourings—so that his readers sometimes doubt, when they would most believe—still he is never profane, but trusts the spirit with the faith of a confessor. If he cannot reconcile contradictory truths, he knows that to the Infinite Mind all truth is *one*; and his religious trustfulness is nowhere more apparent than in his annunciation of such truths; for to trust where we cannot trace is both piety and wisdom. It is this bravery in the cause of universal truth which separates him from the partialists, who only see with one eye, and are satisfied with such vision. To him every truth is polar, and has a positive and negative side. Thus, good presupposes evil, virtue vice, and both are necessary. There is no absolutely pure thing in the world, and none absolutely impure; for there is no perfection out of the Supreme Being, and all the creatures he has made are liable to err.

"That pure malignity can exist," he says, "is the extreme proposition of unbelief;" and he might have added—That pure virtue can exist is the extreme proposition of fanaticism. Emerson, however, has an indestructible faith in goodness, as the ultimatum of humanity; the goal to which all the struggles, deeds, and aims of men are tending. "The carrion in the sun will soon convert itself to grass and flowers; and man, wherever thou seest him, whether on gibbets or in brothels, is on his way to all that is great and good." Such is the strange, strong, and ultra way in which he puts his deep conviction of God's moral government of the world; and although it is liable to painful misconstruction, it is, nevertheless, a profound saying. For what are individual crimes, and national enormities, to the all-piercing eye that measures the round of the sphere, and judges humanity by its results? Are they not the mere mountain peaks, the excrescences, and jagged irruptions, which, when beheld at a point of vision sufficiently lofty, lose their angularities, and cease to interfere with the curve of the circle? To the philosophic mind, this is sufficiently apparent; and the grand upward and onward march of the human race, in spite of the obstructions which private

misdeeds and public wrongs, wars and revolutions, have opposed to it, is the historic proof of the proposition.

Emerson, however, does not by any means intend to assert, because human misdeeds are overruled for good, that *therefore* man is an irresponsible being : on the contrary, he, of all modern teachers, has insisted that man is responsible; that rewards and punishments—or in other words, compensation—swiftly and inevitably succeeds action of what kind soever; that there is no cheating the great Spirit of the universe, who will have justice done *now*, as well as hereafter, and makes every day a day of judgement. His "Essay on Compensation" is a vindication of this doctrine, against the fallacies of tradition, and the falsehood of creeds. He asserts that there is no escaping out of the divine hands, inasmuch as the divine laws have their roots in the human soul, and execute themselves with speedy and relentless justice : that the reward or punishment is not put off till after death, but administered on the instant ; not in the shape of "a crown of life," or a bed of unquenchable fire, but in a decrease or an enlargement of the spiritual *being*. And this doctrine, although it may not be *material* enough to convince the common mind, which cannot believe that justice is really done, unless it *sees* the sword and the judge, is nevertheless true. For to suppose that God will give *material* compensations either here or hereafter, is to misapprehend the nature of his government in relation to the human soul, which is purely moral and spiritual.

Emerson was the first modern teacher who called attention to this subject, and demonstrated the laws by which the Nemesis of God maintains the balance of justice in the world. With him justice is not theological, but spiritual; not arbitrary, but absolute, and *must* be done. The priest has no power in this sphere; cannot enter its precincts, nor interfere with its judgements. For what the priest holds to be most immoral, viz., a want of faith in theological doctrine—in the atonement, for instance, the resurrection, miracles, or the immortal life—Emerson will not admit to be such at all; because they are merely

speculative questions, and cannot, therefore, be arraigned as criminalities before the tribunal of the Eternal. This position, which is the stronghold of Protestantism—the only ground, indeed, upon which Protestantism can rest as an institution—is still very little understood, even by those who lay claim to the priesthood of the dispensation. It is true that Roger Williams, with an insight which was really remarkable, and a liberality which cannot be sufficiently admired, incorporated this principle of the right of private judgement—in all matters of conscience—in the constitution of Rhode Island; but out of that noble republican state we shall not find, even in this day, any national recognition of it. And it is singular that a Puritan of those old, stern, and implacable days, brought up in the straightest system of ecclesiastical government, should have been the first man to build it into the masonry of a state. It required a large, free intellect, a great heart, and a firm resolution, to accomplish this magnificent and sublime fact, in the face of the terrible opposition which he met with from the priests and members of the associated colonies. But it is a truth in itself, and an inherent right of man. Hence its stability in Rhode Island, and its adoption and annunciation by the thinkers of these more modern times. Emerson insists upon it, as the first condition of mental freedom, and the only ground of a rational and enduring faith. He infers that Puritanism in New England has worn itself out; has answered its purpose, and must now give way to more enlightened views, and to a nobler faith. Emerson, and a little band of men who, if they did not adopt his views, had like aims and aspirations, saw this clearly enough; they saw, likewise, that Puritanism stood in the pathway of a better revelation, and was a hindrance to higher life and action. Hence, they resolved to commence a crusade against it; not in any antagonistic form, but according to the laws of the old chivalry which man has obeyed in all periods of mental revolution. They dealt more in affirmations than protests, and sought truth with the fervour of saints, and propagated it with the zeal of apostles. This revolu-

tion, however, in the minds of these reformers, was not effected altogether by the force and circumstances of the time, nor was it entirely a reaction, springing from Puritan decay. For a long time the choicest spirits of New England had been occupied in the study of the old Pagan worthies, of the Eastern religious books, and of the great German thinkers. German literature had taken deep root in New England, and its best writers were well-known there, as Carlyle was, long before they were recognised on this side of the Atlantic. And this study, intense and earnest as it was, produced a rich fruitage of thought, and a desire for a wiser and holier life than the students saw around them in the new world; and, as it always happens, this desire was accompanied by divine illuminations and a heroic enthusiasm.

I cannot better exhibit the growth and consummation of the new ideas, than by quoting from W. H. Channing, in his remarks upon Margaret Fuller, which appear in the "Memoirs."

"The summer of 1839 saw the full dawn of the Transcendental movement in New England. The rise of this enthusiasm was as mysterious as that of any form of revival; and only they who were of the faith could comprehend how bright was this morning-time of a new hope. Transcendentalism was an assertion of the inalienable integrity of man, of the immanence of divinity in instinct. In part it was a reaction against Puritan orthodoxy; in part, an effect of renewed study of the ancients, of Oriental Pantheists, of Plato and the Alexandrians, of Plutarch's *Morals*, Seneca, and Epictetus; in part, the natural product of the culture of the place and time. On the somewhat stunted stock of Unitarianism—whose characteristic dogma was trust in individual reason as correlative to Supreme Wisdom—had been grafted German Idealism, as taught by masters of most various schools—by Kant and Jacobi, Fichte and Novalis, Schelling and Hegel, Schleiermacher and De Wette, by Madame de Staël, Cousin, Coleridge, and Carlyle; and the result was a vague yet exalting conception of the godlike nature of the



human spirit. Transcendentalism, as viewed by its disciples, was a pilgrimage from the idolatrous world of creeds and rituals, to the temple of the living God in the soul. It was a putting to silence of tradition and formulas, that the sacred oracle might be heard through intuitions of the single-eyed and pure-hearted. Amidst materialists, zealots, and sceptics, the Transcendentalist believed in perpetual inspiration, the miraculous power of will, and a birthright to universal good. He sought to hold communion, face to face, with the unnameable Spirit of his spirit, and give himself up to the embrace of nature's beautiful joy, as the babe seeks the breast of a mother. To him the curse seemed past; and love was without fear. 'All mine is thine,' sounded forth to him in ceaseless benediction, from flowers and stars, through the poetry, art, heroism of all ages, in the aspirations of his own genius, and the budding promise of the time. His work was to be faithful, as all saints, sages, and lovers of man had been, to truth, as the very word of God. His maxims were: 'Trust, dare, and be; infinite good is ready for your asking; seek and find. All that your fellows can claim or need is that you should become, in fact, your highest self; fulfil, then, your ideal.' Hence, among the strong, withdrawal to private study and contemplation, that they might be 'alone with the Alone;' solemn yet glad devotedness to the divine leadings in the inmost will; calm concentration of thought to wait for and receive wisdom; dignified independence, stern, yet sweet, of fashion and public opinion; honest originality of speech and conduct, exempt alike from apology or dictation, from servility or scorn. Hence, too, among the weak, whimsies, affectation, rude disregard of proprieties, slothful neglect of common duties, surrender to the claims of natural appetite, self-indulgence, self-absorption, and self-idolatry.

"By their very posture of mind, as seekers of the new, the Transcendentalists were critics and 'come outers' from the old. Neither the church, the state, the college, society, nor even reform associations, had a hold upon their hearts. The past might be well enough for those who, without

make belief, could yet put faith in common dogmas and usages ; but for them the matin bells of a new day were chiming, and the herald-trump of freedom was heard upon the mountains. Hence, leaving ecclesiastical organizations, political parties, and familiar circles, which to them were brown with drouth, they sought in covert nooks of friendship for running waters, and fruit from the tree of life. The journal, the letter, became of greater worth than the printed page ; for they felt that systematic results were not yet to be looked for, and that in sallies of conjecture, glimpses and flights of ecstasy, the 'Newness' lifted her veil to her votaries. Thus, by mere attraction of affinity, grew together the brotherhood of the 'Like-minded,' as they were pleasantly nicknamed by outsiders and by themselves, on the ground that no two were of the same opinion. The only password of membership to this association, which had no compact, records, or officers, was a hopeful and liberal spirit ; and its chance conventions were determined merely by the desire of the caller for a 'talk,' or by the arrival of some guest from a distance, with a budget of presumptive novelties. Its 'symposium' was a pic-nic, whereto each brought of his gains, as he felt prompted, a bunch of wild grapes from the woods, or bread-corn from his threshing floor. The tone of the assemblies was cordial welcome for every one's peculiarity ; and scholars, farmers, mechanics, merchants, married women, and maidens, met there on a level of courteous respect. The only guest not tolerated was intolerance ; though strict justice might add, that these 'Illuminati' were as unconscious of their special cant as smokers are of the perfume of their weed, and that a professed declaration of universal independence turned out in practice to be rather oligarchic."

Such, then, were the influences which awoke these young New England hearts, and made them beat with fresh hope and joy. They would live a new life, a life with God in the soul ; and each of them adopted his own methods to accomplish this. All were in earnest. They would struggle no more for any mere earthly distinction ;

for wealth, lands, and honours. A higher prize was within their reach,—the spiritual world was open to them, with all its sublime immunities and beatitudes. They could become eternal through love, and walk as gods upon a godless and profane earth. It was natural to expect much from such enthusiasm as this; and much really sprang from it; for it gave to America a new literature and infused new life into the rising generation. What it might have accomplished, had it assumed an organic form, and have bound its members together by a common faith, is quite another question. Perhaps it would have revolutionized the whole of America, and have established a new Catholicism, under the shadow of whose altar men might once more have sat in blessed peace. For truly a Catholic religion is not incompatible with individuality of thought; for worship of one kind or another is indispensable to the human soul. But the hour is not yet ripe for such an institution. Individualism must first do its work, and resolve its own problem, and in the meanwhile we must be content to live alone, each one of us,—units,—instead of a grand society—but the latter will come. Romanism foreshadowed it. Romanism was necessary to hold the world together during the infancy of the European mind; Protestantism is dissolving that immense association, now that the intellect of Europe is becoming mature; and when it *is* mature, we shall have a new revelation—a new spiritual illumination which, without ignoring the intellect, shall furnish us with a religion worthy of its homage.

As a sign of the times; a sign of decay and death on the one hand, and of wild, earnest longing after the noble, true, and god-like, on the other, Transcendentalism in Puritan, practical New England, is a remarkable phenomenon; and although the early enthusiasm which accompanied its announcement, and hailed its presence, is dying away—the solid fruits survive. It has taught men to live for high purposes, and to keep themselves pure and holy; for the “pure in heart shall see God;” and none other can hope for the blessed life.

Emerson must be regarded as the high priest of this new illumination in America. He was one of the "like-minded," whom Channing speaks of as composing the little society of Boston, in the year 1839; and who by his orations and essays had already distinguished himself in the literary world. It was not as a literary man, however, in the sense of a book maker and magazine writer, that he was regarded, or upon which his fame rested; but it was as a teacher who had a message to deliver, and truths of high import to announce. No doubt, the elegance of his style was a great attraction, and secured him a hearing in quarters whence he would otherwise have been excluded; but his manner of delivery was ruinous to his success as an orator. It was cold, still, and unimpassioned, even when the grandeur of the thought carried his audience away, and might have forced an iceberg to speak with the tongue of an angel. Still he was listened to with that respect which men of genius and virtue always command. He lectured at various literary institutions, and appealed to the young and ardent, as well as to scholars. His lectures were a new thing in the American Israel; nobody had ever heard such discourses before; so full of thought, power, wisdom, truth, and intellectual daring. His aim was to free the American mind, and make Americans worthy of the country which they occupied and of the name of republicans. In speaking before the literary societies of Dartmouth, he said:—"This country has not fulfilled what seemed the reasonable expectation of mankind. Men looked when all feudal straps and bandages were snapped asunder, that nature, too long the mother of dwarfs, should reimburse itself by a brood of Titans, who should laugh and leap in the continent, and run up the mountains of the west on errands of genius and of love. But the mark of American merit in painting, in sculpture, in poetry, in fiction, in eloquence, seems to be a certain grace without grandeur, and itself not new but derivative; a vase of fair outline, but empty, which who-so sees may fill with what wit and character is in him, but which does not, like



the charged cloud, overflow with terrible beauty and emit lightnings on all beholders; a muse which does not lay the grasp of despotic genius on us, and chain an age to its thought and motion." Emerson saw how imitative was the American mind in its art and literature, and he put the scholars of Dartmouth, in this lecture, which is printed in the collection of his works, upon their metal. He would raise them to manhood, and self-reliance; and teach them to look within for the help that should move the world afresh. It is to scholars specially that he speaks in this lecture, and he shows them their true vocation, and the vast resources which are at their command. "The resources of the scholar are," he says, "in proportion to his confidence in the attributes of the intellect. They are coextensive with nature and truth, yet can never be his unless claimed by him with an equal greatness of mind. He cannot know them until he has beheld with awe the infinitude and impersonality of the intellectual power, and worshipped that great light. When he has seen that it is not his, nor any man's, but that it is the soul which made the world, and that it is all accessible to him, he will then see that he, as its minister, may rightfully hold all things subordinate and answerable to it. When he stands in the world, he sees himself its native king. A divine pilgrim in nature, all things attend his steps. Over him stream the flying constellations; over him streams time, as they scarcely divided into months and years. He inhales the year as a vapour; its fragrant midsummer breath, its sparkling January heaven. And so pass into his mind in bright transfiguration the grand events of history, to take a new order and scale from him. He is the world; and the epochs and heroes of chronology are pictorial images, by which his thoughts are told. There is no event but sprung somewhere from the soul of man; and therefore there is none but the soul of man can interpret. Every presentiment of the mind is executed somewhere, is some gigantic fact. What else is Greece, Rome, England, France, St. Helena? What else are churches, and literatures, and empires?" All this was no doubt new and

*Emittt*

startling enough to his hearers, and the man who could utter it was either mad or inspired. "But the soul, so feeling its right, must exercise the same, or it surrenders itself to the usurpation of facts. Essential to our riches is the unsleeping assertion of spiritual independence, as all the history of literature may teach. The new man must feel that he is new, and has not come into the world mortgaged to the opinions and usages of Europe, and Asia, and Egypt. The sense of spiritual independence is like the lovely varnish of the dew, whereby the old hard peened earth, and its old self-same productions are made new every morning, and shining with the last touch of the artist's hand. A false humility, a complaisance to reigning schools, or to the wisdom of antiquity must not defraud me of supreme possession of this hour. If any person have less love of liberty and less jealousy to guard his integrity, shall he therefore dictate to you and me? Say to such doctors, "We are thankful to you, as we are to history, to the pyramids and the authors; but now our day is come, we have been born out of the eternal silence; and now will we live—live for ourselves--and not as the pall-bearers of a funeral, but as the upholders and creators of our age."

Such were the brave words by which Emerson hoped to quicken the Dartmouth scholars into new life, and new endeavour. For the scholastic teaching of America, like that of England, was painfully slavish, and by confining the mind to old models of thought and learning, it crippled the intellect and fettered the spirit. There was too much mechanism about it—too much dry lore; so that one might pass an entire academical course, and be after all but an encyclopaedia of facts, or a linguistic or mathematical mill. Emerson's aim was to put a soul into this inorganic rubbish, so that it might be used as materials for a man, and not for a showman. He wished to give scholarship a nobler empire; to convince the scholar that his acquisitions were for spiritual as well as secular use; and for the former most of all. Everywhere he appears as an alternate iconoclast and renovator. He breaks the old

idols, and shows how new ones can be made. Not by handiwork and joinery, but by the plastic agency of great ideas. He is for the development of the spiritual nature—as such—as it in man, not as the priests have hitherto moulded it and called by the name of development. There had been quite enough of that; enough of base succumbing to dogmas and mysteries which were frauds and quackeries; now he was for trying what the virgin soil of man would produce from its own inherent vitality. Let the scholar respect himself, stand by himself, adopt his own methods, and accomplish his own work. The

universe is as fresh to-day as it was when God first created it; it has the same wisdom to impart as it had in the dim times lying far back in history, when Eastern men received it, and stamped its impress upon the world for so many hundred years. Inspiration is not past; new Bibles have to be written; new revelations to come; new civilisations to be built up; and art and science are yet to be explored in their deeper retreats. The world is full of hope; the universe still a sphinx; her riddles unresolved. We know little; not even the meaning of the simplest weed. The universe waits for an interpreter. Why not, then, young scholars of Dartmouth, try to become such? All the learning and institutions of the world fall loose, and unhinge themselves, before the mind of Emerson. Nothing is sacred in his eyes, save the human soul. The past is good for the past; good to us, as instruction, as a thing for guidance, not in its path, however, but in our own. "We are born out of the eternal silence," and "our turn is now come."

He makes as light of the old divinity as he does of the old scholarship, and has many things to say to the divines. In 1838 he is called upon to deliver an address before the "Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge;" and he executes the commission with a strange, wonderful, and beautiful daring. Other men may refuse to speak from the soul to his fellows—may shuffle the responsibilities of conviction—and pander to the dead idolatries, if they please; but not so Emerson. Life is short, and lies are

too deeply rooted in the world for him at least to waste time in their eradication. He will speak the truth—and cannot help it. And now the young students are all assembled to hear him; and there *he* stands, upright and impassible, before them. He begins by speaking of the beauty of external nature—"the air full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm of Gilead, and the new hay; night bringing no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade, and the stars pouring down their almost spiritual rays; man under them, a young child, and this huge globe a toy." A noble and beautiful world, the perfection of which he is constrained to respect! How wide! how rich! What invitation from every property it gives to every faculty of man! So it seems to us, as we converse with it through the medium of the *senses*; but the moment the *mind* opens and reveals the laws which traverse the universe, and make things what they are, then the great world shrinks at once into a mere *illustration* and *fable* of this mind. Then come the questions: What am I? and what really is? questions which the *intellect* is ever putting to the sphinx, never to be resolved; and yet it is through the intellect that a knowledge of nature and the powers and uses thereof can alone come. "A more secret, sweet, and overpowering beauty appears to man when his heart and mind open to the sentiment of *virtue*; then, instantly, he is instructed in what is *above* him. He learns that his being is without bound; that to the good, to the perfect, he is born, low as he now lies in evil and weakness. That which he venerates is still his own, though he has not realized it yet. *He ought*. He knows the sense of that grand word, though his analysis fails entirely to render account of it. When in *innocency*, or when by intellectual perception he attains to say: I love the right; truth is beautiful within and without for evermore. Virtue I am thine; save me; use me; thee will I serve day and night, in great, in small, that I may be—not virtuous but virtue; then is the end of creation answered, and God is well pleased." He then shows how immutable is virtue in the world, how evan-



escent is vice; that all things are on the good man's side, and give him arms, hands, and feet, to win the battle; whilst everything shrinks from evil, which is not absolute but privative—"like cold, which is but the privation of heat;" that the perception of this "law of laws awakens in the mind a sentiment which we call the religious sentiment, and which makes our highest happiness." Such are the views which Emerson exhibits in his introduction to the discourse, and by which he intends to show that ideas, knowledge, virtue, and religion are in the *soul*—that the external world is but the medium of the soul's development—and becomes at last a mere "illustration and fable" of it. Hence, he does away with the notion of exclusive revelation—and of a God manifest in the flesh, as this expression is theologically understood; for he asserts that the soul *finds out* all things, and when it has awoke up to the perception of the sublime idea of virtue, that it becomes bathed in an illimitable flood of light and glory, and becomes, as it were, a part of God. He takes away, therefore, all exclusive divinity from Jesus Christ—as the founder of the faith of Christendom—and places all souls that love virtue and God in the same category with him. Then he continues his address: "Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. *One man was true to what is in you and me.* He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and ever more goes forth anew to take possession of his world. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion: 'I am divine. Through me God acts; through me speaks. Would you see God, see me; or see to see when thou also thinkest as I now think.' But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and following ages! There is no doctrine of the reason which will bear to be taught to the understanding. The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips, and said in the next age:

'This was Jehorah come down out of heaven. I will kill you if you say he was a man.' The idioms of his language, and the figures of his rhetoric, have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes. Christianity became a mythus, as the poetic teaching of Greece and of Egypt, before. He spoke of miracles, for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines as the man is diviner. But the very word miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is monster. It is not one with the blowing clover, and the falling rain.

"He felt respect for Moses and the prophets; but no unfit tenderness at postponing their initial revelations to the hour and the man that now is; to the eternal revelation in the heart. Thus was he a true man. Having seen that the law in us is command, he would not suffer it to be commanded. Boldly, with hand, and heart, and life, he declared it to be God. Thus was he a true man. Thus is he, as I think, the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of a man.

"In thus contemplating Jesus we become very sensible of the first defect of historical Christianity. Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion. As it appears to us, and as it has appeared for ages, it is not the doctrine of the soul, but an exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual. It has dwelt, it dwells with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus. The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those of spontaneous love. But by this Eastern monarchy of a Christianity, which indolence and fear have built, the friend of man is made the injurer of man. The manner in which his name is surrounded with expressions, which were once sallies of admiration and love, but are now petrified into official titles, kills all generous sympathy and liking. All who hear me feel that the language that describes Christ to Europe and America, is not the style

of friendship and enthusiasm to a good and noble heart, but is appropriated and formal—paints a demi-god, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris, or Apollo. Accept the injurious impositions of our early catechetical instruction, and even honesty and self-denial were but splendid sins, if they did not wear the Christian name. One would rather be a heathen suckled in a creed outworn than to be degraded of his manly right in coming into nature, and finding not names and places, not land and professions, but even virtue and truth foreclosed and monopolised. You shall not be a man even. You shall not own the world; you shall not dare, and live after the infinite law that is in you, and in company with the infinite beauty which heaven and earth reflect to you in all lovely forms; but you must subordinate your nature to Christ's nature; you must accept our interpretations; and take his portrait as the vulgar draw it.

"That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great Stoical doctrine, 'Obey thyself.' That which shows God in me fortifies me. That which shows God out of me makes me a wart and a wen. There is no longer a necessary reason for my being. Already the long shadows of untimely oblivion creep over me, and I shall de cease for ever. . . . By his holy thoughts Jesus serves us, and thus only. To aim to convert a man by miracles is a profanation of the soul. A true conversion; a true Christ is now, as always, to be made by the reception of beautiful sentiments. It is true that a great and rich soul like his, falling among the simple, does so preponderate, that, as his did, it moves the world.

"The injustice of the vulgar tone of preaching is not less flagrant to Jesus than it is to the souls which it profanes. The preachers do not see that they make his Gospel not glad, and shear him of the locks of beauty and the attributes of heaven. When I see a majestic Epaminondas, or Washington—when I see among my contemporaries a true orator, an upright judge, a dear friend;

when I vibrate to the melody and fancy of a poem. I see beauty to be desired. And so lovely, and with yet more entire consent of my human being, sounds in my ear the true music of the bards that have sung of the true God in all ages. Now do not degrade the life and dialogues of Christ out of the circle of this church, by insulation and peculiarity. Let them lie as they beset, alive and warm, part of human life, and of the landscape, and of the cheerful day.

"The second defect of the traditionary and limited way of using the mind of Christ, is a consequence of the first; this, namely: that the moral nature—that law of laws, whose revelations introduce greatness—yea, God himself into the open soul, is not explored as the fountain of the established teaching in society. Men have come to speak of the revelation as somewhat long ago given and done, as if God were dead. The injury to faith throttles the preacher, and the goodliest of institutions becomes an uncertain and inarticulate voice. . . . In how many churches, by how many prophets, tell me, is man made sensible that he is an infinite soul; that the earth and heavens are passing into his mind: that he is drinking for ever the soul of God? \* \* The priests' Sabbath has lost the splendour of nature; it is unlovely; we are glad when it is done; we can make, we do make, sitting in our pews, a far better, holier, sweeter, for ourselves. Let me not taint the sincerity of this plea by any oversight of the claims of good men. I know and honour the purity and strict conscience of numbers of the clergy. What life the public worship retains, it owes to the scattered company of pious men who minister here and there in the churches, and who sometimes accepting with too great tenderness the tenet of the elders, have not accepted from others, but from their own heart, the genuine impulses of virtue, and so still command our love and awe to the sanctity of character."

He then speaks more directly to the students. "Let me admonish you first of all to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those most sacred to the imagination



of man, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, saints and prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, 'I also am a man!' Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it because it was natural to him; and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty to come short of another man's.

"Yourself a new-born bard of the Holy Ghost, cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first-hand with Deity. Be to them a man. Look to it first and only that you are such; that fashion, custom, authority, pleasure, and money are nothing to you—are not bandages over your eyes that you cannot see—but live with the privileges of the immeasurable mind. Not too anxious to visit periodically all families and each family in your parish connection—when you meet one of these men or women be to them a divine man; be to them thought and virtue; let their timid aspirations find in you a friend; let their trampled instincts be genially tempted out in your atmosphere; let their doubts know that you have doubted, and their wonder feel that you have wondered. By trusting your own soul you shall gain a greater confidence in other men."

This address is remarkable, as exhibiting the earnestness and enthusiasm with which Emerson threw himself into the new movement of spiritual reform that had commenced with the little society of the "Like-minded" in Boston. There were other earnest men—men of learning and genius—and high and beautiful women too, that were connected with the society; but none shone so conspicuously as Emerson, for no one had his great gift of speech. He could interpret his thoughts into rare English, and robe them with an eloquence which had never before been heard in America. Alcott, Brownson, Thoreau, Channing, Margaret Fuller, and Miss Peabody, were amongst the reform party—the dear spiritual saints,

who were going to make a heaven upon hearth; and all these persons were, more or less, people of note and fine gifts. They established a periodical, called "The Dial," which was the expositor of their views, and they made Emerson the editor of it. This book contains papers of great merit, although the "Like-minded" differ from each other very widely upon some important particulars. There is a good deal of cant, too, in the book, and a use of words in no English meaning. Emerson's contributions are decidedly the most sensible and practical, although they are tinged, as might have been expected, with a strange mystic colouring. Alcott is a good man, but a bad writer; some of his pieces nauseate us with their sickly sentimentality. And yet he is, as I learn from Emerson, a fine talker, and a man of very rare insight. Emerson once said to me, "I could spare any of my friends sooner than Alcott; he always brings me new fire from the empyrean, and feeds me with a holy love. He has, too, a strange faculty of discovering the best books in a library, no matter in what language they are written, or whether he knows the language or not." Mangre his friends, however, for the present, let us look at Emerson himself, in the further light of an essayist, or intellectual and moral teacher. We have seen him as a propagandist, earnestly striving to get men to be true to themselves; to leave all traditions, all holy lore, all inspiration, and knock at God's palace with their own hands. We have seen how and why he is opposed to the Christian institutions; for he set forth the ground of this opposition both to the scholars of Dartmouth and to the divinity students of Cambridge. We are now to see him as a speculator on his own account; as a thinker who has cut Christendom adrift from his thought, and, like the ancient Pagan philosophers, has sought to live "the alone with the alone."

I have already spoken of his views upon responsibility, and upon rewards and punishments; views which are by no means common, and could never have been arrived at by a slavish mind. Orthodoxy dare not have spoken

them: and no extant church dare, even now, endorse them. The grand drama of a judgement day, pictured with such poetic and theatrical effect by the old divines, and especially by the great Jeremy Taylor—the “Shake-spear of divines”—loses much of its terror and sublime grandeur, as the last assize before which human nature shall be brought and judged, in the presence of this simple truth, viz., That God does not postpone his judgements, but makes every day a day of judgement. Emerson has not contented himself, however, with the statement of the fact, but has proved it from the universal experience. He makes reward and punishment to consist, not in *physical*, but in *spiritual* dispensations; he shrinks with loathing and immeasurable horror from the idea of a hell of eternal torments, and has even little sympathy with a heaven of eternal happiness and blessedness; he insists upon the now, and will not be thrown from his keen and merciless demonstrations of a *present* judgement. “Every act,” he says, “rewards itself; or, in other words, integrates itself, in a twofold manner; first, in the thing, or in real nature; and, secondly, in the circumstance, or apparent nature. Men call the circumstance the retribution. The casual retribution, is in the thing, and is seen by the soul. The retribution in the circumstance is seen by the understanding; it is inseparable from the thing, but is often spread over a long time, and so does not become distinct until after many years. The specific stripes may follow late after the offence, but they follow because they accompany it. Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that, unsuspected, ripens within the flower of the pleasure which concealed it. Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre-exists in the means, the fruit in the seed.” “Life invests itself with inevitable conditions, which the unwise seek to dodge, which one and another brags that he does not know; brags that they do not touch him; but the brag is on his lips, the conditions are in his soul. If he escapes

them in one part, they attack him in another more vital part. If he has escaped them in form, and in the appearance, it is that he has resisted his life, and fled from himself, and the retribution is so much death. So signal is the failure of all attempts to make this separation of the good from the bad, that the experiment would not be tried—since to try it is to be mad—but for the circumstance that when the disease began in the will, of rebellion and separation, the intellect is at once infected, so that man ceases to see God whole in each object, but is able to see the sensual allurement of an object, and not see the sensual hurt; he sees the mermaid's head, but not the dragon's tail; and thinks he could cut off that which he would have, from that which he would not have."

"Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good. Every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse. It is to answer for its moderation with its life. For every grain of wit there is a grain of folly. For every thing you have missed you have gained something else; and for every thing you gain, you lose something. If riches increase, they are increased that use them. If the gatherer gathers too much, nature takes out of the man what she puts into his chest; swells the estate, but kills the owner. Nature hates monopolies and exceptions. The waves of the sea do not more speedily seek a level from their loftiest tossing than the varieties of condition tend to equalize themselves. There is always some levelling circumstance which puts down the overbearing, the strong, the rich, the fortunate, substantially on the same ground with all others. Is a man too strong and fierce for society, and by temper and position a bad citizen—a morose ruffian, with a dash of the pirate in him;—nature sends him a troop of pretty sons and daughters, who are getting along in the dame's classes at school, and love and fear for them smoothes his grim scowl to courtesy. Thus she contrives to intenerate the granite and felspar, takes the boar out, and puts the lamb in, and keeps her balance true."



In these, and other innumerable instances, does Emerson illustrate the doctrine of compensation. He delights to penetrate the secrets of nature, and lay bare the laws of her government; and in this essay on "Compensation" he has done so, traversing the whole circle of the physical and moral world, and shewing how all things are balanced and held together.

A deep insight is, indeed, manifested in all the writings of Emerson. He looks beyond the rind of things into their centre and cause. The universe is not a dead machine—nor a chance organisation to him—but it is alive with spiritual forces, and is governed by a God. For materialism as a gospel to man, he has the profoundest contempt. It is the dog-theory, and will not prevail. It debases the soul, robs it of its glory, and strips the world of its poetry and beauty. It pins a man to the clay, and cuts his wings, so that he cannot soar even in imagination. It is falsehood; and every man's consciousness gives it back its own lie.

In his essay quaintly styled, "The Over Soul," Emerson thus sets forth his spiritual theory, in opposition to the dog-theory of materialism:—

"All goes to show that the soul of man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, or comparison—but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will—is the vast background of our being, in which they lie—an immensity not possessed, and that cannot be possessed. From within, or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. A man is the façade of a temple, wherein all wisdom and all good abide. What we commonly call man, the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresent himself. Him we do not respect; but the soul whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will

it is virtue ; when it flows through his affection, it is love. And the blindness of the intellect begins when it would be something of itself. The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular, let the great soul have its way through us ; in other words, engage us to obey.

Of this pure nature every man is at some time sensible. Language cannot paint it with his colours. It is too subtle. It is undefinable, unmeasurable, but we know that it pervades and contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man. A wise old proverb says :—“ God comes to see us without bell ;”—that is, as there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to all the attributes of God. Justice we see and know ; Love, Freedom, Power. These natures no man ever got above, but always they tower over us, and most in the moment when our interests tempt us to wound them. . . . The soul is the perceiver and revealer of truth. We know truth when we see it, let sceptic and scollar say what they choose. Foolish people ask you, when you have spoken what they do not wish to hear : ‘ How do you know it is truth, and not an error of your own ? ’ We know truth when we see it from opinion, as we know when we are awake, that we are awake. It was a grand sentence of Emanuel Swedenborg which would alone indicate the greatness of that man’s perception, “ It is no proof of a man’s understanding to be able to affirm whatever he pleases ; but to be able to discern that what is true is true, and that what is false is false : this is the mark of character and intelligence.” In the book I read, the good thought returns to me, as every truth will, the image of the whole soul. To the bad thought which I find in it, the same soul becomes a discerning, separating sword, and lops it away. We are wiser than we know. If we will not interfere with our thought, but

will act entirely, or see how the thing stands in God, we know the particular thing, and every thing, and every man. For the maker of all things and all persons stands behind us, and casts his dread omniscience through us over things.

"But beyond this recognition of its own in particular passages of the individual's experience, it also reveals truth. . . We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term *revelation*. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind. It is an ebb of the individual rivulet before the flowing surges of the sea of life. Every distinct apprehension of this central commandment agitates men with awe and delight. A thrill passes through all men at the reception of new truth, or at the performance of a great action; which comes out of the heart of nature. In these communications the power to see is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception. Every moment when the individual feels himself invaded by it, is memorable. Always, I believe, by the necessity of our constitution, a certain enthusiasm attends the individual's consciousness of that Divine presence. The character and duration of this enthusiasm varies with the state of the individual, from an ecstasy, and trance, and prophetic inspiration, which is its rarer appearance, to the faintest glow of virtuous emotion, in which form it warms like our household fires, all the families and associations of men, and makes society possible. A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as 'if blasted with excess of light.' The trances of Socrates, the 'union' of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the convulsions of Geo. Fox and his Quakers, the illumination of Swedenborg, are of this kind. What was in the case of these remarkable persons a ravishment, has, in innumerable instances in common life, been exhibited in less striking manner. Everywhere the history of religion be-

trays a tendency to enthusiasm. The rapture of the Moravian and Quietist, the opening of the internal sense of the Word (in the language of the New Jerusalem Church), the revival of the Calvinistic churches, the experience of the Methodists, are varying forms of that shudder of awe and delight with which the individual soul always mingles with the universal soul."

Thus we see that Emerson is a spiritualist, in the profoundest signification of the term; and that if he teach doctrines opposed to those of Christianity, as generally interpreted, he is faithful to the spirit of Christianity. He maintains that the soul is all; that it is the originator, perceiver, and revealer of truth, and that Christianity itself is no more a revelation than any other truth is a revelation. He is no idolator; and looks upon persons as the mere organs of spiritual manifestation. He does not believe in human gods, and has no knee for that worship; but in God, as the great, unknown, unspeakable Being—upholding all things, guiding and controlling all things—he has the deepest faith. He goes direct to him as the fountain of all light and truth, and will have no mediator. What God speaks to his soul, that he also speaks to men. There is no tradition in his writings, no hearsay, but the message is delivered at first-hand. Hence the earnestness and enthusiasm which mark the whole of his first published essays and orations. And yet Emerson has no system of thought and belief. He often contradicts himself, and the most opposite statements lie side by side in his pages. We are to reconcile them as we can. Neither is there any attempt made to reason out a proposition; it is all affirmation. He speaks with the authority of a prophet, and we feel that what he says is true, and good for life and conduct. A braver man has not written for many years; nor a better man. He is at home in the highest and the lowest regions of thought. In his paper on "Love," he comes nigh to the solution of that profound mystery which the word love symbolizes; and it is certainly as fine a discourse as any to be found in Plato, in Plutarch, or Jeremy Taylor. He thus



closes it :—" Thus are we put in training for a love which knows not sex, nor person, nor partiality, but which seeketh virtue and wisdom everywhere, to the end of increasing virtue and wisdom. We are by nature observers, and thereby learners. That is our permanent state. But we are often made to feel that our affections are but tents of a night. Though slowly and with pain, the objects of the affections change, as the objects of thought do. There are moments when the affections rule and absorb the man, and make his happiness dependent upon a person or persons. But in health the mind is presently seen again—its overarching vault, bright with galaxies of illimitable lights, and the warm loves and fears that crept over us as clouds, must lose their finite character, and blend with God to attain their own perfection. But we need not fear that we can lose anything by the progress of the soul. The soul may be trusted to the end. That which is so beautiful and attractive in these relations, must be succeeded and supplanted only by what is more beautiful, and so on for ever." He has a word also to say about prudence and friendship; and his essays on "Self-reliance" and "Heroism," are two of the most vital contributions which have in late days been added to literature. They came, too, at the right time, when self-reliance and heroism were most needed to be preached. Many a young heart, beating high with the enthusiasm of new life, has grown strong and brave under their teaching; and it is not too much to say that a nobler book than these essays could scarcely be put into the hands of our youth.

Thomas Carlyle introduced them to the English public, in a characteristic preface, in the year 1840 (I think); and they gained immediate popularity. Many subsequent editions were pirated on all sides, and sold at one shilling a copy. It is impossible to estimate the effect these essays produced on the minds of the young and thoughtful in England. There was a freshness and beauty about them absolutely fascinating; and for a long time it was

customary to swear not "by him who sleeps in Phike," the solemnest oath of the Egyptians, but by him who lives at Concord.

In the meanwhile Emerson was bringing fresh messages from the gods—"not in his sleep, I fancy," as Carlyle says—but in his widest waking hours. Amongst other compositions, he had written his completest and best, styled "Nature," which is a solution, so far as it is possible to solve it, of the mystery and meaning of the universe and of the human soul. This is the groundwork of it, being a passage from Plotinus: "Nature is but an image or imitation of wisdom, the last thing of the soul; nature being a thing which doth only do, but not know." The treatise is wrought out under the following headings:—"Commodity," "Beauty," "Language," "Discipline," "Idealism," "Spirit," "Prospects." The length to which this article has already extended, prevents us from making any analysis of this treatise, or any extracts from it. Nor is this necessary to our purpose; for it contains nothing new in idea, which may not be found in the extracts already quoted. It will be interesting to learn, however, something of the external circumstances in which it was written; for so little is known of the outer life of Emerson, that any bit of information of this sort is quite a godsend. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his "Mosses from an old Manse," says that "it was here (namely, in the Manse at Concord) that Emerson wrote 'Nature,' for he was then an inhabitant of the Manse, and used to watch the Assyrian dawn and Paphian sunset and moon-rise, from the summit of our eastern hill." He then describes the study of the old house:—"When I first saw the room," he says, "the walls were blackened with the smoke of unnumbered years, and made still blacker by the grim prints of puritan ministers that hung around. These worthies looked strangely like bad angels, or at least like men who had wrestled so continually and so sternly with the devil that somewhat of his sooty fierceness had been imparted to their own visages. They had all vanished now; a cheer-

ful coat of paint, and golden tinted paper hangings, lighted up the small apartment; while the shadow of a willow tree, that swept against the overhanging eaves, attenuated the cherry western sunshine. In the place of the grim prints there was the sweet and lovely head of one of Raphael's Madonnas, and two pleasant little pictures of the Lake of Como. The only other decorations were a purple vase of flowers, always fresh, and a bronze one containing graceful ferns. . . .

"The study had three windows, set with little old-fashioned panes of glass, each with a crack across it. The two on the western side looked, or rather peeped between the willow branches, down into the orchard, with glimpses of the river through the trees. The third, facing northward, commanded a broader view of the river, at a spot where its hitherto obscure waters gleam forth into the light of history. It was at this window that the clergyman who then dwelt at the Manse, stood watching the outbreak of a long and deadly struggle between two nations; he saw the irregular array of his parishioners on the farther side of the river, and the glittering line of the British on the hither bank: he awaited in an agony of suspense the rattle of the musketry. It came—and there needed but a gentle wind to sweep the battle smoke around this quiet house." We have then a word or two about the Concord—"the most unexcitable and sluggish stream that ever loitered imperceptibly towards its eternity—the sea. It slumbers between broad prairies, kissing the long meadow-grass, and bathes the overhanging boughs of elderbushes and willows, or the roots of elms and ash trees, and clumps of maples. Flags and rushes grow along its plushy shore; the yellow water-lily spreads its broad flat leaves on the margin; and the fragrant white pond-lily abounds, generally selecting a position just so far from the river's brink that it cannot be grasped, save at the hazard of plunging in."

Then follows a luscious picture of the orchard and the garden—and an account of the old garret where a world of lumber, which had been accumulating since the Revo-

lution, was deposited. "It was an arched hall, dimly illuminated through small dusty windows; it was but a twilight at the best; and there were nooks, or rather caverns of deep obscurity, the secrets of which I never learned, being too reverent of their dust and cobwebs. The beams and rafters roughly hewn, and with strips of bark still on them, and the rude masonry of the chimneys, made the garret look wild and uncivilised; an aspect unlike what was seen elsewhere, in the quiet and decorous old house. But on one side there was a little white-washed apartment, which bore the traditionary title of the Saint's Chamber, because holy men in their youth had slept, and studied, and prayed there. With its elevated retirement, its one window, its small fire-place, and its closet convenient for an oratory, it was the very spot where a young man might inspire himself with solemn enthusiasm, and cherish saintly dreams. The occupants, at various epochs, had left brief records and speculations inscribed on the walls. There, too, hung a tattered and shrivelled roll of canvas, which, on inspection, proved to be the forcibly wrought picture of a clergyman, in wig, band, and gown, holding a Bible in his hand. As I turned his face towards the light, he eyed me with an air of authority such as men of his profession seldom assume in our days. The original had been pastor of the parish more than a century ago, a friend of Whitfield, and almost his equal in "wild eloquence. . . . A part of my predecessor's library was stored in the garret; no unfit receptacle, indeed, for such dreary trash as comprised the greater number of volumes. The old books would have been worth nothing at an auction; but in this venerable garret they possessed an interest quite apart from their literary value, as heirlooms, many of which had been transmitted down through a series of consecrated hands, from the days of the mighty Puritan divines. Autographs of famous names were to be seen, in faded ink, on some of their fly-leaves; and there were marginal observations, or interpolated pages closely covered with manuscript, in illegible short-hand, perhaps concealing matters of profound truth and wisdom, &c."



Such, then, is a glimpse of the old Manse in which Emerson wrote his "Nature;" and wherein he dwelt as a successor of those solemn old Puritan clergymen, for a season. Hawthorn took the house after Emerson had left it, and his preachings—of the Unitarian kind, at least—for ever; and a pleasant residence he had there, entertaining Emerson himself sometimes; and Ellery Channing, who "came up the avenue to join him in a fishing excursion on the river;" and the brave Thoreau also, who lives on books and oatmeal; this last a most rare man, who has published a work called "A Week up the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," which is unique in its kind—and full of learning, wisdom, and picturesque sketches. We could wish that a little more was known of the outer life of Emerson; but in default of this it is pleasant to speak of his friends; inasmuch as friends always throw light upon each other.

We now approach a new epoch in the mind of Emerson, which, to all students and lovers of him, must be intensely interesting. It will be seen that up to this point our author has been a spiritual and moral teacher, a propagandist of new truths, a priest, and an apostle. We have now to regard him in another light, viz., as a secular thinker. For in the second series of "Essays," published in England in 1844, he drops the high Hebraic tone which he had previously assumed, and speaks upon man and the world in the language of a philosopher. He has passed out of the influence of the great solar system, by which he had been first attracted—that system, I mean, which the souls of Plato, Proclus, Plotinus, Kant, Fichte, and others mainly constituted—and instructed by the eloquence and wisdom of these mighty sons of God, he steps once more upon the solid earth, folds his fiery wings around him, and is content to deal with humanity in a lower sphere. Not that he ever for a moment abandons the high ground and spiritual insight to which he has attained, but he does not again stand upon this ground, or use this insight *exclusively*. There is other ground besides the spiritual—the ground

of intellect, morals, social life—and he will traverse this. Hence, the second volume of "Essays" treats of Experience, Character, Manners, Gifts, Politics; along with other themes of a higher kind, such as the Poet, Nature, Nominalist, and Realist, &c.

The change in the tone and manner of these "Essays," compared with the previous ones, is very striking; and in an artistic sense they are much superior to them. It is beautiful and pleasant reading, this book of "Essays," and the style is much freer, purer, and more idiomatic than that of the former book. We are indebted to Montaigne for this change in Emerson's style and mode of thought. It is clear that Emerson has studied Montaigne—that he has to some extent adopted his scepticism—and become more catholic than he was wont to be. Not more liberal, perhaps, but *more-sided*; calmer also, and freer from Hebraic enthusiasm. Let any one compare the admirable paper on Manners, in the second, with that on Prudence, in the first series of "Essays," and he will see at once what we mean by these statements.

But the best book which Emerson has published is, perhaps, the "Representative Men;" which exhibits a keen insight into human character, and fine powers of analysis. It was our good fortune to hear several of the papers of which his book consists, delivered by Emerson during his last visit to England; and we think those on Swedenborg, Montaigne, and Napoleon, are the best. The criticism on Montaigne is a fine piece of writing, full of graphic strokes and genial recognitions. They are all good, however, and it would be difficult to match them in our literature. Emerson has been compared to Carlyle; but the difference between the two men is sufficiently wide and characteristic. Nor was it possible, except by a large stretch of imagination, to compare them at all as to manner and art, until the publication of the "Representative Men." Now, however, such a comparison may be fairly instituted; for we find them both in the same domain and engaged in the same work. Biography is the *forte* of both, too; and neither has written so well as when engaged in this department.

We have no time to compare them in any lengthened detail; but if we take a glance at the "Cagliostro" of Carlyle, and the "Napoleon" of Emerson, we shall immediately see the likenesses and differences which exist between the two writers. Carlyle is a great artist, a great anatomist and physiologist, who lays bare the motives and the springs of action, as well as the action itself; and he follows his hero from the beginning to the end of his history, with a merciless fidelity, making him more and more distinct, more vivid and life-like, at every stroke of his pencil. He is a colourist, too, now wild and barbaric, now soft and sunny as a Claude landscape. He overlooks no feature of his subjects, but gives us every one of them; until at last we feel that we have before us a true and faithful portrait. Emerson deals very little in colouring, very little with the outer life of any of his heroes. Now and then we have a gleam of this sort, but it is incidental, and not a necessary part of the work. His method is to seize upon the idea which moved his subject, and to work from that outward. He gives us the result of his studies of human character, not the "cold process" of them. He knows the cause and the effect; and can trace the effect to the cause. In the paper on "Napoleon," we have no history of the man, properly so called, but we have his spiritual image; Napoleon unburned from the flesh; Napoleon in ideas; and yet we feel that this also is a true portrait.

We cannot follow out these dottings of comparison further, however. Let us now finally look at Emerson as a poet. Here again we trace the same characteristics which mark his prose compositions. A mystic spiritualism pervades them all; deep hidden meanings lie also at the bottom of them. He interprets Nature for us by the hieroglyphical ciphers which he finds flaming in the chambers of his own soul. Nature is to him a great picture-book of spiritual facts—a symbolical revelation for the soul to read; and he who has eyes can discern how close the poet lies to the very heart of Nature. But his poems will never become popular. They are too mystical

and refined, and deal too much in abstractions, to be generally read and appreciated. It is only the few rare spirits, of a kinship with his own, that can love and understand them. It is, nevertheless, a disgrace to our critical literature, that no attempt has ever been made by the critics to come at their soundings; and the fact is significant enough. The "Sphinx," "Monadnoc," "Hermione," "Initial, Delphic, and Celestial Love," are the most mystical in the book, and are crowded with deep meanings. Of the more lyrical kind are, the "Humble Bee," "Helen in the South," "Good-bye, proud world, I'm going home," "To Eva," &c. Nor must we forget the beautiful "Threnody," written on the death of the poet's son.

There is little attempt at melodious utterance in any of these poems; they are for the most part rude wood-notes, echoes of the forest and the prairie. Very often the rhythm is singularly deficient, as if in very defiance of the laws of the art. And yet the lines often ring with music, or have a deep, soft, sweet undertone, which is really charming. The poems, however, are all studies; and are not to be read in haste, or for mere sensuous gratification, but for the high purposes of light and life.

We must not extend our remarks further, however; and will briefly sum up. Emerson was born at Boston, U.S., in 1803. He graduated at Harvard University, and took his degree of B.A. in his 18th year, devoting himself thenceforth to theological study. He afterwards became a Unitarian minister; but growing too large for his congregation, he resigned his ministerial charge, and took to literature. He soon after made the tour of Europe, visiting most of the great men in England, on his way, and amongst them Thos. Carlyle, who, at that time, was living at Craigen-Puttock. This latter visit laid the foundation of a long subsequent friendship and correspondence, the benefit of which the world has yet to receive. We have already seen how he passed his time in writing and lecturing, on his return to America, and we have endeavoured to trace through his



writings the progress of his mind during that period, up to the year 1817, when he again visited England, by the special invitation of a large number of his friends and admirers, to deliver lectures at our mechanic's and literary institutes. Alexander Ireland, Esq., the editor of the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, was the gentleman who undertook to make all Emerson's business arrangements; and Emerson accordingly gave his first course of lectures in the Manchester Athenæum. Few people there present knew what to make of these lectures; they were so ultra, and so utterly unlike anything that had previously been heard by them. The manner of the lecturer, too, was to all appearance most eccentric. He mounted the rostrum in a free and careless style; took his MS. out of his pocket, and standing bolt upright, began to read in his calm, cool way, as if he were a great overgrown school-boy, saying his task. There was no effort in his elocution; it was downright plain reading, and nothing more. Now and then his face lighted up, and his strange mystic eyes flashed as with the Delphic fire, but it was a momentary ebullition, and the statue was itself again. When he had finished his discourse, he made his exit as abruptly as he had entered; and as he never stopped whilst he was reading, to give time to the applause of his auditors, so he did not remain on the platform for a moment to receive it, when he had concluded. He subsequently lectured in most of our large towns; and in London he had for his audience some of our highest literary men and noblemen. He returned to America in 1818.

Emerson is married, and has several children. He lives at Concord, in Massachusetts, in a house on a farm of his own, within a short distance of the river, and contiguous to a sequestered lake, which is enclosed by mountains and overhung with trees, and on whose waters our author frequently launches his boat and sails during the warm summer days and evenings. At such times, Thoreau, Alcott, or Ellery Channing are his companions, and happy must these favoured ones be in such high and royal company.



In personal appearance Emerson is tall, and rather thin, with a long Yankee face, a large head, and great compass of forehead. His eyes are clear and bright—dark grey, or blue eyes—and there is a singular expression in them at times, like the gleaming—not of a “basilisk,” as George Gilfillan maliciously says—but of a myotic spirit. The whole expression of his face is very fine, with the exception of the mouth, which like that of every strong souled man, is sensual. His hair is of a lightish brown, not clustered in curls, but “long, lank, and brown,” and lies careless athwart the forehead.

In social life Emerson has all the simplicity of a child about him; his manners are polished and pleasing, and he wins you as much by his silence as by his courteous speech. He talks but little in mixed company, and it is only when he is alone with a friend, perhaps, that you discover what manner of man he is. Then he lights up his discourse with the lamps of the good and the wise in all ages, and grows large and eloquent. His reading, we soon see, is very extensive, and often of a very rare kind. But he makes no display, and his learning is merely introduced to illustrate his thought.

Such, then, is Emerson, as we know and understand him, or, rather, such are faint dottings of what we know and understand of him; for we feel that nothing like a full justice has been done to him, in a critical sense, in this paper. If, however, this rapid sketch of his mind and character, deduced mostly from his own writings, shall induce any one who knows him not, to become henceforth acquainted with his writings, our purpose will have been answered; for no one knows better than we do, that this paper is not a *biography*, although, perhaps, it is the only kind of biography that can at present be written of Emerson.

## EMERSON'S BANQUET AT MANCHESTER.

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BEFORE Emerson left England for America, he invited a number of gentlemen, whose acquaintance he had made during his sojourn amongst us, to a farewell symposium, at Manchester. A more motley, dissimilar, heterogeneous mass of persons never before, perhaps, met together at the table of a philosopher. Persons of rare gifts, and varied culture, and accomplishments—but with one or two exceptions—not a man amongst them who had any real relationship to Emerson, or care for his teachings. As might have been expected, therefore, the meeting was a failure—so far as any high intercourse, and genuine exchange of thought and feeling were concerned;—and the company divided themselves into little cliques, and talked their small talk, and literary gossip, leaving Emerson to draw around him the few there present, who really loved and revered him.

It was late in the afternoon of that boisterous winter's day, when we, having marched from the far moors of Yorkshire, and crossed the steep and rocky summit of Stanedger, knocked at the gate of Emerson's house, in Manchester. It was a small, unpretending house, with a little garden in front, and as we entered we found the hall crowded with coats, hats, sticks, and philosophical umbrellas. A large globe lamp stood upon the table, and there was the noise and chatter of many voices, mingled with bursts of laughter in the room where the guests were assembled.

We were not expected, although warmly invited; for money was scarce in those days, and the journey long. As we entered the room, therefore, the host rose to welcome us all the more cordially, introducing us to many

there who were previously unknown to us. And, when we had recognised friends, and exchanged courtesies with all, we took our seat beside Emerson, who expressed himself happy in seeing so many persons around him, who had interested themselves in so many and such various ways in his mission to England. "There are some men here," said he, "to whom I should like more particularly to introduce you, as persons of mark and genius;" and whilst he was thus speaking, a tall, thin, ungainly man, about 30 years of age, speaking in squeaks at the top of his voice, making all kinds of grimaces and strange gesticulations, with a small Puritan head, which was more than half *forehead*, approached to our side of the room, book in hand, desirous, as he said, of pointing out a fine passage in Plato, to Emerson, which he had just been reading. Without more ado he put the volume within half-an-inch of his eyes, and read the passage. After which he commenced a long dissertation upon it—twisting his body into all conceivable and inconceivable forms, rolling up the whites of his eyes, and moving his head from shoulder to shoulder with extraordinary activity. Learned and eloquent, he poured forth a stream of talk—not presumptuously, but with a diffident confidence, if we may use such an expression, whilst Emerson sat silent and listening, with that calm pale face of his, the eye thoughtful but not excited, and the mouth occasionally lighted up with a faint moonlight smile. He was evidently pleased, and so were all who listened to that wonderful six feet of brain and nerves. Nor was much exception taken to what he said. An occasional objection made the speaker stop—roll up his small, twinkling, swinish eyes; turn his head, which seemed to be hung on a swivel,—and then, with rapid recognition, and rapid speech, start off again in eager, genuine earnestness, and overwhelming energy of lungs, throat, and tongue. After this display, and when the speaker had grown calm, and sat reposing at the bottom of his now empty and exploded volcano, Emerson rose and presented us to him in form, and never was there such an extra-

ordinary scene. He shot bolt-upright from his chair, and stood for a moment long and lank before us ; and then his body fell—not in a curve but at right angles, dividing itself, as if on inscrutable hinges, midway down the spinal marrow, and his face came in contact with his outstretched hands. In a moment he recovered his perpendicular, and wheeling round on the pivot of his right heel, and bowing at us with his nether parts and a the *opposite window* with his head, he retreated to the place from whence he came.

Emerson smiled ; and we, half choked with a suppressed but raging Etna of laughter, suffered the direst agony which such a condition can inflict upon the human mind and body. We were delighted, nevertheless, with the man—the queer, strange, eloquent man ; the odd, nervous, contorted man, whose body was made of Birmingham stub-twist, all jointed from top to bottom of it, and capable of turning any way, in violation of all anatomical laws. “That man,” said Emerson, “is a fine scholar, has a fine mind, and much real culture. He is well read in literature, in philosophy, in history ; and has written rhymes, which, like my friend Ellery Channing’s are very nearly poetry.” We then had a conversation about Channing and Thoreau.—“I will give you,” said Emerson, “in a few minutes, a copy of Channing’s Poems, and his *Conversations at Rome*. “Thoreau,” he added, you will hear of by and by. He is now writing a book, most of which I have heard, called “*A Week up the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.” We subsequently went with Emerson to his chamber, where he unpacked his portmanteau, and gave us these books of Channing’s, which we still preserve, along with others.

We had scarcely returned to the room, when a card was put into our hand bearing the name of a friend who had long wished to see Emerson, and who had now come from Nottingham for this purpose. He was well known to Emerson, through a book which he had written on divine, and other, far sweeter love ; and we went forth to bring in the young philosophical theologian to the host and to

the company. He was a thin, timorous, young man ; not more than twenty years old—with strange, mystic eyes, and a head and face like George Herbert's. A very singular young man, loving God and man too much to be a priest, and yet not quite happy out of the pale of the church. A devout follower of Emerson, at this time ; and tinged with his thought. A genuine spiritualist ; not in name merely, but in life and endeavour. He lived on roots and water—that nature and God's thought and inspiration might flow through him without impediment. A beautiful gentle-natured young man—a poet also, as well as a preacher and an apostle. He sat at the right hand of Emerson, the introduction being over, and was the St. John of the company. We three, for some time, talked much together, sitting apart on the sofa ; whilst all around us the fire of brilliant conversation was flashing through the room.

In one group were four Scotchmen—a Doctor of Law—an ex-Unitarian minister—the editor of a celebrated Manchester paper, and a proprietor of the same. The doctor was witty, and full of anecdote and puns. The Unitarian minister was brilliant as a Vauxhall exhibition—full of metaphysics and poetry, which last he was constantly repeating, or rather singing in a half musical, half savage Scotch drawl—a man of talent, genius, and many capabilities ; but acrid, fierce, egotistical, and intolerant of interruption. An unmannerly Monologue. Now, however, he could not have it all to himself. There were too many competitors. The editor had been a weaver, and was a hard, iron man, learned in Adam Smith, and possessed by the glitter of Carlyle. The proprietor was a dark, bilious man, with black hair, kind intelligent black eyes, a friendly, genial, face, and a most true and affectionate nature. He had been brought up to business, and was the business man of his firm ; and it was mainly through him that the paper had so solid and influential a position. He was fond of books and of the fine arts ; and had one of the finest and rarest private libraries in the city. He loved Emerson, and was beloved by Emerson, and managed all his busi-



ness transactions for him. Many a happy day and night have we spent with him—now wandering over the hills and vallies of Todmorden and Hebden; now in the neighbourhood of John Bright's carpet manufactory, at the foot of the first spur of the Derbyshire hills in Lancashire; and now enjoying the hospitalities of Jacob Bright, or the quiet evenings, at his own beautiful and refined home in Manchester. He made that Scotch group beautiful by his presence, and joyous by his joviality and rich fund of anecdote and literary learning.

Close to them—digesting all that passed, and sneering in his Mephistopheles moods at much that was worthy of reverence—sat a dark, Shakespear-browed young man, with the general *physique* of a Spaniard. He wore eye glasses, and seemed to belong to nobody but himself. Now and then he uttered some cold remark, which fell upon the company like ice; he enjoying the confusion and silence which he had caused. Or he would utter some witty sayings, which made everybody laugh, and him smile sardonically. He was a great reader; had been some time connected with the British Museum, and was a perfect catalogue of the names of many thousands of volumes in the library of that wonderful emporium. A very clever, and when he liked, a very fascinating man—and an admirable writer of English prose.

There was one man there—about whom we shall say no more than that he reminded us of Judas at the Last Supper.

All kinds of odd and unrelated people were congregated in that room. German playwrights, and musicians, artists, poets, literati, journalists, Christians, infidels, pantheists, and mere book-worms.

At last the dinner was announced, and we sat down to the repast, Emerson sitting at the head, and our friend the proprietor, at the foot of the table. The Apostle John, again sat at the right hand of his Master, and that odd compound of stuff from Birmingham sat at his left. It was our lot to sit next to this good Birmingham friend—who was so short-sighted that we were in torture every

time he moved his ungainly limbs. And not without cause. For all on a sudden, starting with spasmodic motion, and addressing Emerson, his hands came violently upon his plate and dashed it and the contents upon his lap. There was a slight buzz and titter round the table, then silence, then a rapid dashing talk, and then a round volley of laughter (caused by some witticism, of course), and in the midst of it our friend recovered his plate and the fragments thereon. The apostle John dined off boiled cabbages and water, throwing his knife and fork away from him when he had finished, as if he was ashamed of that business, and like Solon despised the human kitchen. Then the wine was passed—and then came another scene. Emerson invited him of Birmingham to drink with him. The glasses were filled, but when our friend was in the act of raising the glass to his lips, he let it fall upon the table, and the wine gushed like blood in all its rich indignant stains over our unfortunate shirt front.

The dinner otherwise, was dull enough. These two were the only incidents worth recording, except some puns of the Scotch Doctor, which, though we thought good at the time, have long since escaped us. Emerson spoke very little—except whilst seeing after the comfort and provisioning of his guests.

We remained but a short time at the table after dinner, and returned early to the drawing-room, there being no wine-bibbers present.

The evening's entertainment was the one redeeming thing in this banquet. It consisted of a reading by Emerson—at urgent request—of his paper on Plato, which has since been published in the *Representative Men*. After that, the evening fell flat and dead; and we, heartily tired of it, took an umbrella and went out of the house to smoke a cigar in the rain, by way of refreshment. On our return, most of the company were gone, or going. Three of us remained behind with Emerson, viz., the Birmingham friend, Apostle John, and January Searle. We sat far into the night. Amongst

other things, Emerson said that he had just visited Carlyle—who had grown so fierce and savage that he should be afraid of trusting some of his more gentle and spiritually minded friends in his presence. His denunciations of high and sacred things are so terrible, he said, that they could not fail to do harm to any young, unbalanced persons who did not know from what deep sincere depths all that denunciation sprung. Carlyle, he said, had grown impatient of opposition, especially when talking of Cromwell. I differed from him, he added, in his estimate of Cromwell's character, and he rose like a great Norse giant from his chair—and, drawing a line with his finger across the table, said, with terrible fierceness: 'Then, sir, there is a line of separation between you and me as wide as that, and as deep as the pit. Emerson was sorry for all this; for he loved Carlyle's genius, and genuine manly nature. When, said Emerson, Carlyle had finished the volume of the *Bastille* of the *French Revolution*, he left the MS. on his study table, and his servant lit the fire with it. Carlyle said nothing, but sat down again like a brave man, and rewrote it. It was Sir Isaac Newton's heroism revived. He told us, also, that he had long been in correspondence with Carlyle, and that he had some letters from him which would prove of the very highest importance hereafter.

The literary men of England made very little impression upon Emerson; although he spoke of some modern works with praise. Of some private and unknown persons he was almost enthusiastic in his laudations. It was life, not literature that he cared about. And yet he was a great reader of Goethe; and read some chapters of him every morning in the German, and and also of Montaigne.

We all breakfasted together next morning; when the Apostle John and ourselves drove off to the train on our separate journeys homewards, bidding Emerson adieu, perhaps, for ever.







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